

# PIGS CAN FLY



Getty Images

**Well-trained service animals accompanying their owners in the aircraft cabin are no risk to safety, according to a Flight Safety Foundation report.**

**T**owards the end of 2000, media around the world picked up the story of Charlotte, the high-flying pot-bellied pig. As a service animal, Charlotte was allowed to sit with her owner in the first class cabin during a six-hour US Airways flight from Philadelphia to Seattle. Her owner had a med-

ically diagnosed heart condition, and Charlotte helped relieve her stress.

Unfortunately, complaints were made after the flight that Charlotte's on-board behaviour had been less than impeccable. A report submitted to the US Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) alleged that the pig became uncontrollable, trying to enter the cockpit and refusing to leave the galley until food was tossed at her.

However, the pig's owner denied any wrongdoing on her pet's part and the FAA found that the airline had acted appropriately in allowing the animal onboard.

"US Airways and its personnel acted in a reasonable and thoughtful manner, based on a legitimate request to transport a qualified individual with a disability and her service animal," an FAA spokesman told the Associ-

ated Press.

For a pig to fly as a service animal in the cabin of any Australian registered aircraft – whether it's a domestic or international flight – the airline would need to be granted an exemption against regulation 256a (carriage of animals).

The same is true of other service animals – except for dogs.

The regulation allows a dog accompanying a seeing or hearing impaired person as a guide or an "assistant", to be free of the requirement for other service animals to be in a "container". The dog must be placed on a "moisture absorbent mat" as near to the owner as possible, and be restrained so that it cannot move away from the mat.

There are several kinds of animals that help people with disabilities. The US Department of Transportation notes in guidance material that the wide range of service animals can make it difficult for airline employees to distinguish between a service animal and a pet.

Airlines also have the right to refuse to carry a particular animal because of concerns over disruptive behaviour or hygiene. However, most airlines will do their best to accommodate people who need their animal.

Service animals are used to:

- Help people with visual impairment move around safely.
- Alert people with hearing impairments to sounds.
- Help people with mobility impairments open and close doors, retrieve objects, transfer from one seat to another and maintain balance.
- Sense an imminent seizure and alert people with epilepsy or respond to a disability-related need or emergency (such as some psychiatric disabilities).

Dogs can be trained to pull a person's wheelchair, help the person rise from a sitting or fallen position, carry a backpack, summon help and provide a buffer against jostling in crowds.

In the US, airline personnel assess the status of service animals in two basic categories: animals other than emotional-support animals (such as guide dogs) and emotional support animals.

The difference is how airline personnel determine whether a specific animal qualifies for this treatment under laws, regulations and policies.

Some service animals wear harnesses, vests, capes, collar tags or backpacks that

assist – but are not definitive – in distinguishing them from pets. However, not all service animals wear such identification.

Service animals usually travel in the cabin, whether or not they are needed to provide assistance during the flight. The passenger with the disability is considered the “handler” and is solely responsible for its handling, care and supervision.

**On duty:** The assisted passenger will expect cabin crew to know that the service animal is on duty, and should not be petted or spoken to by anyone except the assisted passenger, even though many service animals have been trained to behave appropriately with strangers in public places.

The International Air Transport Association recommends “cabin crew, or other passengers should not approach the animal. Food and water should only be provided at the master’s request”.

If the animal is small enough, it will sit under the seat, or against the fuselage on a window seat, otherwise airlines usually seat assisted passengers and their animals in a bulkhead seat for extra room.

The Civil Aviation Safety Authority (CASA) says in an advisory to passengers that it is best not to sedate dogs, as drug reactions can be different at high altitudes and could lead to illness. CASA also notes that many experts recommend removing the dog’s harness to allow ease of movement and avoid the harness catching on objects around the seat.

US regulations require flight attendants to offer specified alternatives when a service animal does not fit at the originally assigned seat location.

“You should relocate the passenger and the service animal to some other place in the

cabin in the same class of service where the animal will fit under the seat of the passenger and not create an obstruction, such as the bulkhead,” a US Department of Transport (DOT) guidance document states. “If no single seat in the cabin will accommodate the animal and passenger without causing an obstruction, you may offer the option of purchasing a second seat, traveling on a later flight or having the service animal travel in the cargo hold.”

Guidance material for Canadian air carriers says that cabin crew must also consider

### The passenger with the disability is considered the “handler” and is solely responsible for its handling, care and supervision.

whether the placement of a service animal would interfere with cabin crew duties in the event of an emergency evacuation; for example, if a crew member needed to get to the window to assess the outside conditions before an exit was opened.

In 2004, the FAA clarified the safety issues surrounding the carriage of service animals on regular public transport.

After reviewing several reports on fatal commercial aircraft accidents and safety studies of aircraft evacuations and accident survivability, the FAA found service animals had not been a hindrance in any emergencies, and issued the following recommendations:

- “A service animal may be placed at the

feet of a person with a disability at any bulkhead seat or in any seat as long as when the animal is seated/placed/curled up on the floor, no part of the animal extends into the main aisle(s) of the aircraft, the service animal is not at an emergency exit seat and the service animal does not extend into the foot space of another passenger nearby who does not wish to share foot space with the service animal.

- “Lap-held service animals (such as a monkey used by a person with mobility impairments) ... are service animals that need to be in a person’s lap to perform a service for that person. This service animal may sit in that person’s lap for all phases of the flight including ground movement, takeoff and landing provided that the service animal is no larger than a lap-held child (a child who has not reached his or her second birthday).

- “Unusual service animals pose unavoidable safety and/or public health concerns, and airlines are not required to transport them. Snakes, other reptiles, ferrets, rodents and spiders certainly fall within this category of animals. The release of such an animal in the aircraft cabin could result in a direct threat to the health and safety of passengers and crewmembers. For these reasons, airlines are not required to transport these types of service animals in the cabin, and carriage in the cargo hold will be in accordance with company policies on the carriage of animals generally.

- “Other unusual animals such as miniature horses, pigs and monkeys should be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. Factors to consider are the animal’s size, weight, state and foreign country restrictions, and



Monkeys and dogs are among the animals used to assist people with disabilities, and may need to accompany their owners in the aircraft cabin.

whether or not the animal would provide a direct threat to the health and safety of others, or cause a fundamental alteration (significant disruption) in the cabin service. In most other situations, the animal should be carried in the cargo hold in accordance with company policy.”

The behaviour of the service animal is particularly important, because it could impact on cabin safety.

“Service animals are trained to behave properly in public settings,” the DOT guidance document points out.

“For example, a properly trained guide dog will remain at its owner’s feet. It does not run freely [on] an aircraft or an airport gate area, bark or growl repeatedly at other persons on the aircraft, bite or jump on people, or urinate or defecate in the cabin or gate area.

“An animal that engages in such disruptive behaviour shows that it has not been successfully trained to function as a service animal in public settings. Therefore, airlines

are not required to treat it as a service animal, even if the animal performs an assist function for a passenger with a disability or is necessary for a passenger’s emotional well-being.”

**Evacuations:** When it comes to emergencies, the Global Aviation Information Network (GAIN) recommends that cabin crew instruct passengers to hold the animal in their lap when exiting via an escape slide. If they become separated, the animal should be led to the top of the slide and pushed down after the passenger has left the aircraft.

By placing the animal on the passenger’s lap, it helps prevent claws, teeth, harness or collar from tearing the slide, and helps the passenger keep control of the animal.

Transport Canada warns against seating passengers with animals in exit rows.

“Depending on the aircraft configuration, seats at emergency exits or in emergency exit rows may have more leg room or foot space or

there may be a vacant area adjacent to these seat(s) and the emergency exit,” the authority says.

“Air operators are ... cautioned against relocating passengers with service animals to these seats for the cruise portion of flight. Circumstances prior to descent (for example, turbulence, in-flight emergency) may prevent the passenger and service animal from safely returning to the assigned seat for landing. To avoid accidental injury, care should be taken to ensure that the animal’s extremities are not protruding into the aisle at any time.”

ing your dog to eliminate on newspapers and into a super-absorbent diaper will give you options to use no matter where you are. Place a plastic bag under the [absorbent material] to protect the surface below and to make cleanup easier.”

If a dispute arises between an airline employee and a passenger about the status of a service animal, US flight attendants are expected to immediately consult with the on-duty complaint-resolution official (CRO), an employee designated under the DOT

regulations to make related operational decisions.

“In the rare instance that a service animal would raise a concern regarding flight safety, the CRO may consult with the pilot-in-command,” the DOT guidance document says.

“If the pilot-in-command makes a decision to restrict the animal from the cabin or the flight for safety reasons, the CRO cannot countermand the pilot’s decision.

“Do not make assumptions about



According to the Delta Society, a US organisation that specialises in service animals and travel issues, passengers should plan each flight with the animal’s individual characteristics and limitations in mind.

“Some service dogs adapt well to the new environment, schedules, food and water; others become distracted or stressed,” a Delta publication says.

“This can affect their ability to work, their needs to eliminate, their appetites and their dispositions. ... Discuss [with a veterinarian] how to recognise and treat motion sickness (and altitude sickness if you will be in high altitudes) in your dog ... Ask how long to withhold food and water before and during travel to reduce the dog’s need to eliminate.

“Teaching your dog to eliminate on command, and to [eliminate] in a variety of situations, will help you overcome any obstacles to meeting your dog’s toileting needs. Teach-

how a particular unusual animal is likely to behave based on past experience with other animals. You may inquire, however, about whether a particular animal has been trained to behave properly in a public setting.

Before deciding to exclude the animal, you should consider and try available means of mitigating the problem (muzzling a dog that barks frequently, allowing the passenger a reasonable amount of time under the circumstances to correct the disruptive behaviour, offering the passenger a different seat where the animal won’t block the aisle.”

Cabin crew could also be wrong in their assumptions about what appears to be disruptive behaviour. If a service animal barks, growls or whines it could be reacting to someone stepping on its tail, or alerting people to its handler’s medical condition.

*Adapted from "Guidelines Enable Service Animals to Travel Safely at a Passenger's Seat" in Cabin Crew Safety, March-April 2005, Flight Safety Foundation.*